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BIHAR YOGA®

The History of Bihar School of Yoga

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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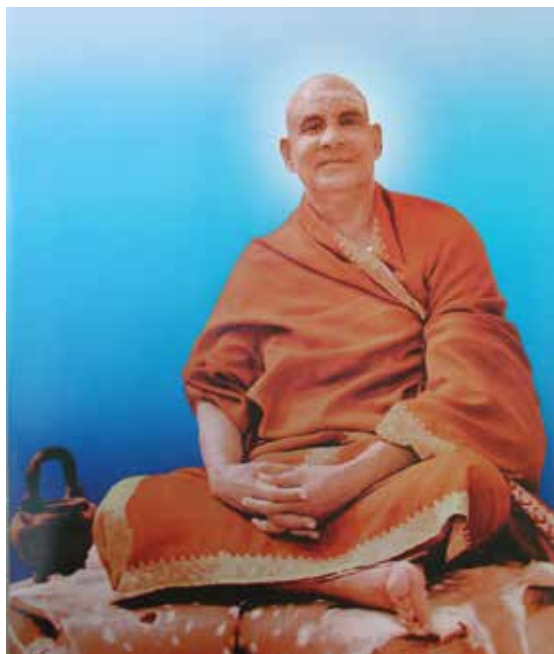
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

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The Birth of a Movement



The story of yoga in this century begins in the 1940s. Until then, yoga had remained unknown; nobody knew what it was, how to practise it, or how to use it for one's own development. Yoga existed, but it was considered to be a sadhana, a practice of renunciates, sadhus and sannyasins who were striving for self-realization. Yoga was distant from society.

In 1943, our paramguru, Swami Sivananda Saraswati, established the Sivananda Ashram on the banks of Ganga in Rishikesh. There, he was joined by many young people who heeded his call to live and lead a divine life. In fact, the mission of Swami Sivananda is known as the Divine Life Society.

Swami Sivananda's call to divine life

The main vision that Swami Sivananda gave to everybody was that this material life, this tension-filled life, can be lived with dignity, clarity, creativity and an awareness of the higher spiritual nature within. The person who is able to cultivate this higher spiritual nature and awareness, and live a creative, disciplined life leads a divine life, a harmonious life, an integrated life. This became the call of Swami Sivananda when he established the Divine Life Society, Sivananda Ashram, in 1943.



To give an experience and understanding of the divine life, Swami Sivananda used two tools: yoga and Vedanta. The tool of yoga is applied as sadhana to transform the lower nature, qualities and traits of the human personality and achieve physical, mental, emotional and spiritual balance, harmony and upliftment. Vedanta is applied to live an ideal in this material life which can connect one with the Supreme Reality. In this manner, Swami Sivananda used the tools of yoga and Vedanta to encourage and inspire people to experience the spiritual life. Then, over the course of time, he gave his disciples a mandate: propagate yoga.

Many of the disciples questioned him, asking, “Why are you asking us to propagate yoga when, in our tradition of sannyasa, we are followers of Vedanta and we keep away from society and people? Why do you want us to go into society to propagate yoga, which is not even our field?” He answered, “Yes, in your personal life you are a sannyasi, so live that. As your tradition, you are the follower of Vedanta, so follow that. In your public and professional life, you are a propagator of yoga. Therefore, live that.”

Thus, Swami Sivananda made a very clear distinction between the personal life and the professional life of his disciples. He said, “In your personal life you are a sannyasin, so live like a sannyasin, but in your professional and public life you are an exponent of yoga, so propagate yoga. In both lives, live the ideals of Vedanta, as ultimately it is that which will elevate you, transform you, change you, and make you into a true human being.” With these words, he sent his disciples to different corners of the world where they taught yoga. The disciples of Swami Sivananda are well known the world over for their yoga expositions: Swami Satchidananda, Swami Vishnudevananda, Swami Sahajananda, Swami Satyananda. Thus, the disciples of Swami Sivananda lived the lifestyle of a sannyasin, lived the ideals of Vedanta, and propagated yoga. This was the life of sannyasa that Swami Sivananda had conceived.

Passing on the torch of yoga

When the mandate to propagate yoga was given to his disciples and they all spread to different parts of the world, Swami Satyananda came to Munger.

Swami Satyananda was not a yoga teacher; he had never learnt yoga. At the time of his departure from the ashram, he had said to Swami Sivananda, “I do not know yoga; I have never had any training in yoga. What do you expect me to teach? How can I fulfil your order? How can I fulfil your mandate?” Swami Sivananda then initiated Sri Swamiji into the secrets of yoga in a very short time. In five to ten minutes he transferred his knowledge of yoga to Sri Swamiji. This was possible as Sri Swamiji himself was not a normal person.

The divine life of Swami Satyananda

Sri Swamiji was born in 1923, and since childhood he had different spiritual experiences which people would consider as some kind of mental infirmity or sickness that needed treatment. However, when the yogis and sannyasins who passed through the village on their travels saw this young boy, they would explain that he was not suffering from any illness or mental infirmity; rather, he was experiencing the states of samadhi and higher yoga. They insisted that instead of being medically treated, he should be taken to a guru.

This indicated to the family that Sri Swamiji had come with special samskaras, certain characteristics and traits which the family alone could not support. It was these samskaras and traits that prompted Sri Swamiji to leave his home at an early age. Eventually he found Swami Sivananda in 1943, the year Swami Sivananda was establishing the ashram in Rishikesh. Thus, starting from 1943, Sri Swamiji lived with him, following only one instruction of his guru: “Involve yourself in selfless service and perform all your duties. The light is within you; once you purify yourself through seva, the light will shine forth.” While keeping these guidelines of his guru in mind, Swami Satyananda did not join a single class of either yoga or Vedanta for twelve

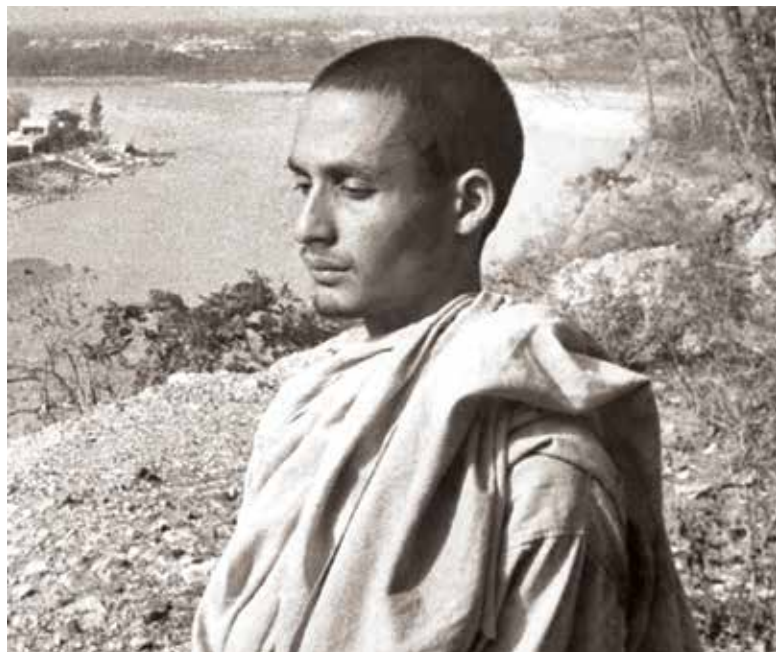
years while he lived in the guru's ashram, but did all the administrative work and other jobs of the ashram: from being the water-carrier, to cook, to editor, to secretary of Swami Sivananda.

Sri Swamiji performed many roles in the ashram. Through guru's grace he purified himself too, as he had no expectation of any kind. He just wanted to live in the presence of his master. There was no ambition, no expectation, no desire, nothing which would even give him the thought, 'I should move out of Rishikesh.' It was Swami Sivananda who pushed him out, saying, "Rishikesh is too small for you. Go out. The world is waiting. Propagate yoga."



Sri Swamiji said to him, “I have no understanding of yoga, what do you expect me to do?” However, the clay was right, and the potter was able to make a beautiful container out of this ready clay in a very short time. In ten minutes, Swami Sivananda gave Sri Swamiji *shaktipat*, the transmission of energy and experience from guru to worthy disciple, the transference of data from one hard drive to another. Swami Satyananda left Rishikesh not as Swami Satyananda, but as Swami Sivananda himself. The logic behind the process is quite simple: once you transfer the contents of a hard drive on to another hard drive, the second hard drive is the exact replica of the first. This is what happened with Sri Swamiji; he became the exact replica in mind, spirit, thought and deed, of his guru, Swami Sivananda.

After leaving Rishikesh, Sri Swamiji travelled throughout India and the subcontinent, covering the regions of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Burma, Bangladesh, Ceylon and India.



Munger becomes the base of yoga

For nine years, Sri Swamiji travelled to assess the needs of society. He came to Munger for the first time in 1956 and, on the very land where Paduka Darshan is today, was given a room in a house near the Ganges, by the family who owned it. Sri Swamiji used to perform his sadhanas there, in the round Golkothi, which still exists. From time to time he would come, perform his sadhanas, deepen his spiritual experiences and then travel and teach yoga; a little bit here, a little bit there, meet this person, meet that person, start other work such as the publication of magazines, and then return to Munger.

Munger actually became his base from 1956 onwards; it was the place where he would frequently return to live an isolated life in between his public activities. It was here in Munger that he had the vision of a white figure emerging from the ground. This was at the location of Jyoti Mandir where the deepak is burning today. This emerging white figure said to him, “This place will be the seat of yoga, and yoga is the culture of tomorrow.” At that instant, Sri Swamiji realized that his destiny was somehow linked with this property, and something involving yoga would develop here.

Ganga Darshan: a realized vision

Many years later, when Sri Swamiji reflected back, he told a story about the time in 1950 when he had gone on an all-India tour with Swami Sivananda. They were in Rameshwaram, the southernmost tip of India, at the Jyotirlinga temple. There, Sri Swamiji had a vision of a river, a hillock, and buildings on that hillock. Then, much later, in 1977, when the architectural plans and designs of Ganga Darshan were made and shown to him, this memory flashed before his eyes. He said, “I have seen this construction, this place, this ashram before, in my vision at Rameshwaram in 1950.” Therefore, what you are seeing here, this ashram, he saw in 1950 at Rameshwaram as his future mission.

When Swami Sivananda left his mortal frame on 13th July 1963, Sri Swamiji was in Munger. As per the tradition of sannyasa, wherever a sannyasin is at the time of his guru's samadhi, they establish themselves there, and as Sri Swamiji was in Munger at that time, he established the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger. Since the day the foundation of the school was laid in 1963, Sri Swamiji thought only of how to develop yoga as a subject, as a science, as a lifestyle, and all his efforts have been towards that. Sri Swamiji's style was unique, as he was not only a propagator of yoga; rather, one could say he was the initiator of many small movements which in the course of time, became big.

Sannyasa training

Sri Swamiji started training sannyasins. The first group of sannyasins came to him in 1964, and they were only six people. I was one of them. Another person was a barber, one person was a shoemaker, another was a sweeper, one was a college student, and another was a householder woman. He started his training with this group of six people, and he definitely trained us. Now classes and seminars started to be conducted. I am talking about 1964, 1965, 1966. Then, gradually, in ones and twos, people started to join. Regular fifteen-day and month-long courses began to take place. Once, there was a six-month yoga sadhana course for Indian nationals in which approximately sixty people participated, our maximum capacity at that time. Swami Shankarananda, who is the guardian of the ashram, the eldest sannyasi, came at that time to participate in the course.

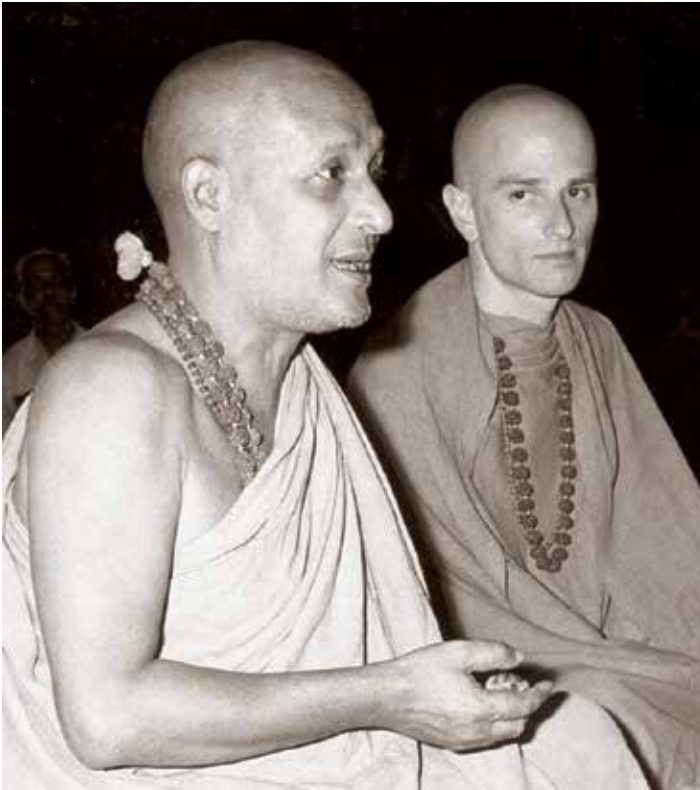
Then, a nine-month International Teacher Training Course was held, in which teachers from Denmark, France, America and Australia were trained. Swami Janakananda became the emissary of yoga in Denmark, trained by Swamiji in 1968. Swami Devatmananda became the emissary of yoga in France in 1968. Swami Nirmalananda, Roma Blair, became the emissary of yoga in Australia in 1968.



In this manner, it was the sannyasins who went back to their countries after receiving the nine-month training and established the first schools of yoga in their respective countries. Then, in the 1970s, the yoga work became global. Swamiji conducted a sannyasa training course in which 108 participants came. Many left and many stayed. Swami Kaivalyananda is one of them; Swami Gorakhnath is one of them; Swami Nityabodhananda is one of them. There are many sannyasins still present from that group of 108, and it was these people who spread to various parts of the world and opened the first yoga ashrams worldwide.

It was these sannyasins who created the Bihar Yoga tradition, the Satyananda Yoga tradition. After all, what is the Bihar School of Yoga? The Bihar School of Yoga is just a collection of buildings, and buildings don't go out to teach yoga. The people who are committed to the development of an idea represent that school of thought, and the school of thought we represent is that of Bihar Yoga.

Globally, yoga is taught by many individuals, centres and organizations. It is like education. The same subjects of art, science, and commerce are taught in all the universities, from Timbuktu to China to America. In all the universities across the board it is the same subject: history, geography, math, science, art, commerce. However, some universities excel and are recognized as universities of repute. Why? It is due to the people; the teachers, the professors who take it upon themselves to do the best, to give their best. Oxford is well known the world over. Cambridge is well known the world over. Why? It is due to the people and the teachers there. If they change, their reputation will go down tomorrow; they will become ordinary institutions.



Bihar School of Yoga: the Oxford of yoga

There are many schools and organizations of yoga: hatha yoga, raja yoga, bhakti yoga. However, the Bihar School of Yoga, due to the dedication, commitment and effort of its teacher and sannyasin cadres, has become the Oxford of yoga. Even today, there are very few organizations that continue to do research and investigate the principles and the practices of yoga like the Bihar School of Yoga does. An example of this is seen in the wide variety of literature and publications that are produced by the institute on a regular basis. Thus, it is definitely a commendable contribution that people associated with the Bihar School of Yoga are making in creating a new chapter in the history of spirituality and yoga. This vision started with Swami Sivananda, was passed down to Swami Satyananda, and through Sri Swamiji to us. Sri Swamiji had a unique foresight: classical yoga, but with a practical and scientific application. Thus, he inspired yoga research and yoga education.

Maintaining tradition through commitment

It is the committed people, the sannyasins and the teachers of the Bihar School of Yoga, who have maintained the tradition and kept the sanctity intact. After all, it was not necessary for Sri Swamiji to start the tradition of sannyasa, and if he had wished, he could have simply initiated people as yoga teachers and told them to open centres and teach yoga. However, it was his will and wish that only committed and dedicated people be involved in this mission, as only they will be able to contribute positively towards the development of a *vidya*, a knowledge. If there is an ulterior motive, then that motive becomes the primary focus, and not the selfless participation in the creation of a beautiful garden. When you work in a garden, you try to beautify the garden and not take away plants from the garden.

Sri Swamiji has said that the foundation and the bricks have been laid. Now the work is yours to raise the building, and for that every effort is welcome. This is the position that

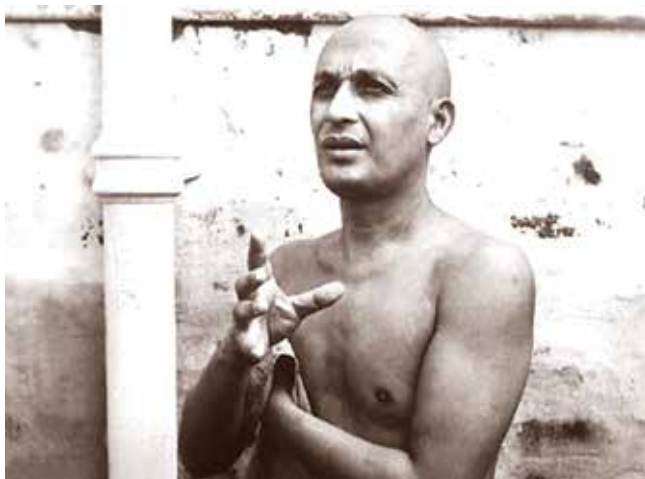
the Bihar School of Yoga is in today. Every effort is welcome; there has to be a shift in the awareness of humanity now. Without this shift of awareness, the quality of life cannot be improved. What is needed is an improvement upon the quality of life. What is the use of comforts and luxuries if the quality of life has deteriorated? If, however, the quality of life is maintained and enhanced, then comfort and luxuries have no meaning. To fulfil this idea of living the divine life, Sri Swamiji started training sannyasins so that eventually, one day, one of them would become a luminary for many people to emulate. It is through the sannyasins that the tradition will remain alive.

Sannyasa: living for others

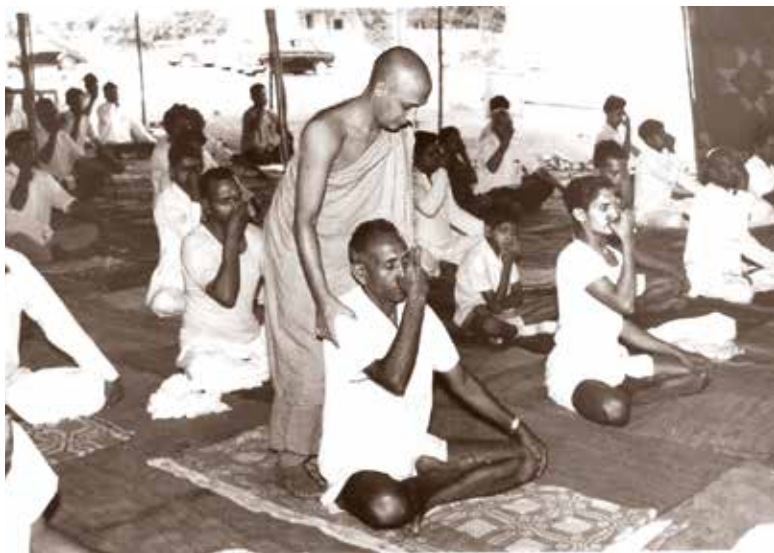
Many people have taken initiation. Many people have committed themselves to the path of yoga and spirituality, and many people live a spiritual life at home with an awareness or identity, 'I am a sannyasin.' That is good, as this identity connects you with the selfless quality of your nature. The quality of a sannyasin has to be selfless. Sri Swamiji used to tell us many times, "The cow eats grass, but gives you milk to drink. The cow does not drink her own milk. She eats the hay and the grass, which is rubbish for you; however, after consuming that hay and grass, she gives you milk, which nourishes you." In the same manner, the water in the river is for others; the river does not drink its own water. The fruit of the tree is for others; trees do not eat their own fruit. The fragrance of a flower is for others; the flower does not smell its own fragrance. In the same manner, the life of a sannyasin is for the benefit of people around, and not for the benefit of that sannyasin. If you read the history of the Bihar School of Yoga, you will see what Sri Swamiji has said about sannyasins, "I want steel. I do not want wood. I want steel." He saw them as a force of something positive, something uplifting, something that could give new inspiration to society. This is the idea that we must understand, that we must try to imbibe. After all,

just by living in a hospital one does not become a doctor. You may know about medicine, but you are not officially the doctor. In the same manner, just by living in an ashram you do not become a sannyasin. For that, rigorous mental awareness has to be maintained. I am using the words 'rigorous mental awareness', constant mental awareness has to be maintained.

Of course, people live their lives in the manner they are comfortable with. Some sannyasins live their life as a family person, as karma sannyasins, following their duty, and that is perfect. Some sannyasins live as yoga teachers, and have their group of students; that is also perfect. Some sannyasins visit the ashram from time to time just to indicate their connection to the place; that is perfect. Some sannyasins commit for a lifetime. Not everyone is a committed person. Some commit for a few years, some commit for a lifetime. In this manner, everyone lives their sannyasa. You have to understand that as sannyasins of the Satyananda tradition, Sri Swamiji has given us a direction and a vision, to fulfil the mandates of yoga and Vedanta. Yoga is here and Vedanta is in Rikhia. Both institutions represent the two aspects of Swami Sivananda's vision which Sri Swamiji worked to actualize.



Training, Research and Social Application



The establishment of the Bihar School of Yoga is the result of a vision of our paramguru, Swami Sivananda. He believed that everyone in this world is capable of leading the divine life. For him, the idea of divine life consisted of utilizing the best qualities that we have come with to make our life better, more beautiful, more fulfilling and more creative. For him, divine life did not mean God-intoxication, but appreciating and worshipping life as a gift of God to us.

Swami Sivananda's vision of yoga propagation

In order to explain and give the experience of the divine life that he spoke of, Swami Sivananda chose the medium of yoga and Vedanta. This was the training he gave to all his disciples. Even though as sannnyasins, yoga is not our field, Swami Sivananda specifically gave yoga training and Vedanta training to all his sannnyasin disciples and asked them to spread through the world and propagate the message of yoga.

When our guru, Swami Satyananda, received the mandate to propagate yoga, he started travelling across India and the subcontinent. He came to Munger in the course of his wanderings and study of human mentality and needs. In Munger, Sri Swamiji reached the apex of his spiritual realization, and it was here that the mission of Swami Sivananda became clear to him. Following a sequence of experiences, and the mandates that he received from these visions and experiences, he established the Bihar School of Yoga (BSY) and started propagation of yoga. This happened in 1963.

The beginning of training at BSY

In 1964, the first batch of students were given yoga training. This first batch consisted mainly of people from the town of Munger. Then, in the same year, a group of people joined Sri Swamiji and requested him to give sannnyasa initiation.

This group consisted of a barber, a shoemaker, a primary school teacher, a student, a housewife and a little kid by the name of Niranjana. This is how we six became the first sannnyasin disciples of Sri Swamiji.

The life we lived with him was definitely a life of yoga; we imbibed yoga from him. It was not that he gave us any formal class, but you have to understand what our intention was at that time. When people come today, they have a specific purpose, to learn something; however, when we came we did not come with the purpose of learning yoga; we came to just live with our guru. Whether we went to any class or

not did not matter. The contentment was that we were with our guru, and that was our life. He was the example, he was our hero. How he thought, how he lived, how he acted, how he spoke, how he taught, we observed all these things, imbibed them and learned from them.

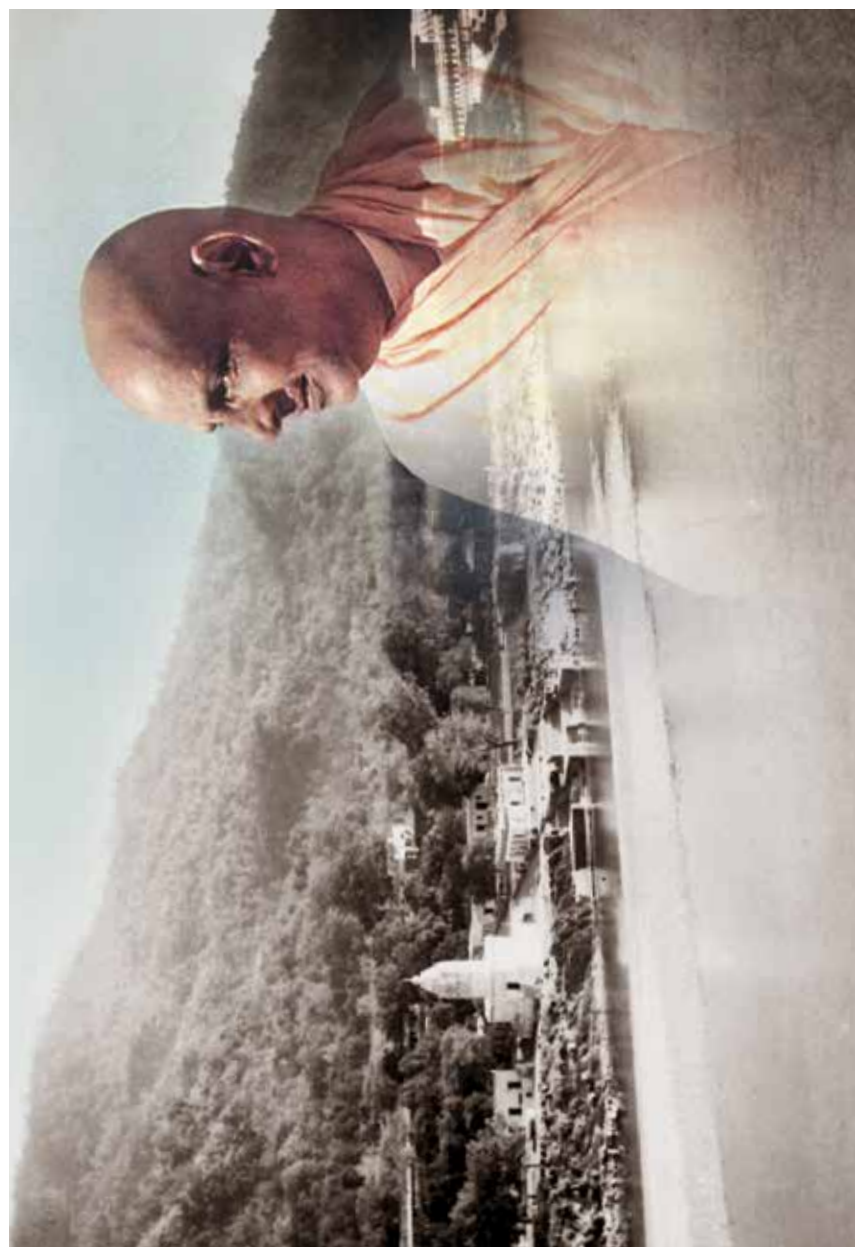
Early life in BSY

What you see here today is a mirage that even I cannot understand. In the early days, from 1963 to the 1970s, we did not even have money to buy one meal. Yet, we were never hungry. At the age of six, I used to go with a gunny bag to the Munger market and pick up the leaves thrown on the road. You know how you find vegetable leaves torn and thrown away in the market? I used to pick up those leaves, put them in my gunny bag and bring them to the ashram where we would clean them, remove the rotten parts and cook the remaining. Maybe there were three leaves of spinach in ten litres of water. That was our meal.

We definitely lived a very hard life. None of you can imagine what we have been through. If we ever received salt, it was a feast. That was the condition in which we lived, the hardship we went through. However, the appreciation for each and every penny came by living in that state.

I remember when a swami once lost twenty-five paisa in Jamalpur station, six kilometres away from the ashram. He had to go back to the station and search for the twenty-five paisa that had fallen on the ground and come back with it. Sri Swamiji had sent him back, saying, “No, you can’t lose it. Go and find it and come back when you have found it.” That was the condition in which we lived with our guru.

In the course of time, the caravan started to grow, as more and more people joined in. In 1970, the first three-year sannyasa training course was held in which 108 participants came, and it was conducted by Sri Swamiji himself. At that time we could sustain it as we had no expectations of any kind, no future plans of any kind.



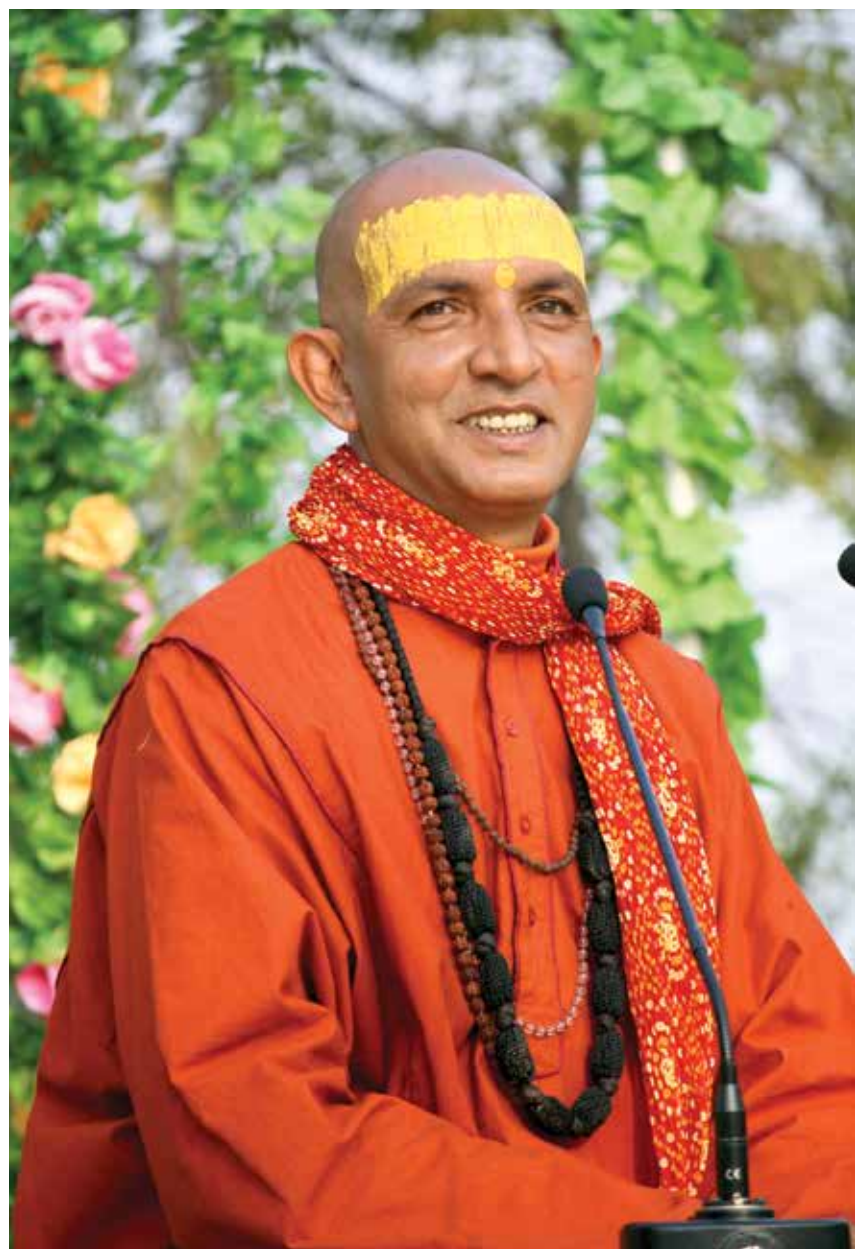


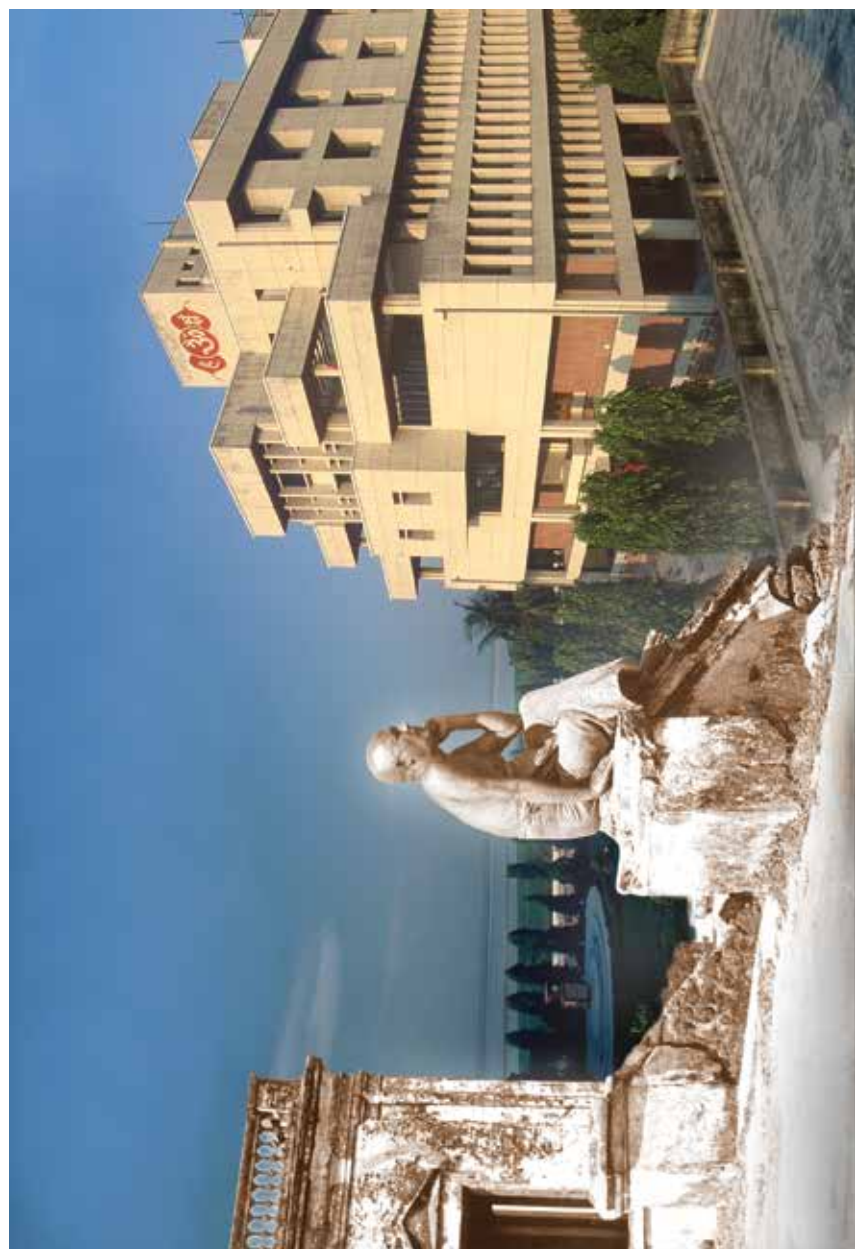














The first test

In those days, I was a terror. I was also the admission in-charge. When the three-year sannyasa training started, people came with a three-year supply of razor blades, three-year supply of this and that, and I used to take everything away from them. A person came with a tin of biscuits, with the idea that 'In the ashram we don't get enough food.' So, here was a tin of biscuits and it came to my notice. When the person was practising yoga nidra, I went into the room, picked up the tin, distributed the biscuits to everybody who was there, and put the empty tin back. When this lady returned from yoga nidra feeling hungry, she went to her tin and it was empty. We had great fun in those days.

I was the admission in-charge and out of the 108 people who came, maybe 54 left because of me! However, those who survived me and my naughtiness continued through the sannyasa training course and came out with flying colours. It was this group of sannyasins who went with Sri Swamiji, and Sri Swamiji left them in different parts of the world; Swami Atmananda in Ireland, Swami Amritananda, Swami Akhandananda, Swami Niranjanananda, Swami Kaivalyananda, Swami Gorakhnath. He sent us all out, and in 1971, the yoga work actually started globally. Prior to that, he had just prepared the ground.

The yoga vision becomes global

Sri Swamiji had prepared the ground and given initial training to teachers from Europe, Australia, the Middle-East, America and Africa, but it was when the sannyasins went out that the ashrams were actually established. Centres were established, and sannyasins began teaching yoga. During this time I met Rishi Vasishtha and Rishi Arundhati, who were pioneers in establishing yoga centres in Europe in the early seventies.



The intention of Sri Swamiji was that in order to preserve and nurture a lifestyle, a knowledge, an experience, a team of people with high spiritual awareness should come forward. Thus, the sannyasa training became the medium through which people were able to cultivate a different type of awareness in their life over and above the normal, material awareness.

Sri Swamiji always felt that the yoga teacher who lives in society gets very diverted and distracted due to the environment that is out there. He is also always looking for survival. For such a person, yoga can never be a selfless activity; some selfishness will always creep into it. If selfishness creeps in and develops, yoga will become a commercial activity and not a process of personal experience and realization. Thus he emphasized the idea that it is sannyasins who must become the masters of yoga, as they can connect with the needs of people with a different awareness, with a different perception, with a different sankalpa. Sannyasins are in a better position to help them with their detached, selfless and compassionate attitude. In the course of time, it was the sannyasins trained by him who spread yoga wherever they went, and who also developed the tradition of Satyananda Yoga.

Yoga of head, heart and hands

Yoga teaching was not enough for Sri Swamiji. He always had the guidelines of his guru, Swami Sivananda, in his mind. Yoga must be used for the integrated development of human personality. Yoga must be used for bringing out the dormant potential of the personality, and not just as a tool to feel good physically, become flexible or stress-free. That is one purpose, one role of yoga which you apply in your life, but that is not the final role of yoga. The final role of yoga is the enhancement of the human nature and the cultivation of the positive potential, the creative potential.

This was the thought of Swami Sivananda as well. He said, “Yoga has to be an integral practice.” Hatha yoga by

itself is no yoga. Raja yoga by itself is no yoga. Kriya yoga by itself is no yoga. Karma yoga by itself is no yoga. There has to be a proper integration to derive the maximum benefit from yoga. Which areas or dimensions of your personality and nature need to be enhanced? The mind, the heart, and the hands. 'Head, heart, and hands.' The *jnana*, the intellect, the wisdom, the knowledge, the understanding, the awareness: that is 'head'. The *atmabhava*, the sentiment, the openness, the clarity, the compassion: that is 'heart'. The *kriya*, the creativity, the efficiency, the expression: that is 'hands'.

Systematic and progressive teaching

A combination of practices helps to enhance the qualities of each area, and Sri Swamiji was the first one to teach meditation in a systematic, progressive manner. He was the first one to teach pranayama in a progressive, systematic manner. He was the first one to bring out the knowledge and the concepts of mudras and bandhas in a progressive, systematic manner. He was the first one to classify asanas from beginner's to intermediate to advanced; all in a very systematic and progressive manner. He distilled the practices of yoga from the ancient traditions and scriptures, and presented them in a most simple, clear, practical and scientific way to enable people to understand and appreciate the far-reaching effects of yoga.

The people whom Sri Swamiji trained followed this tradition to whatever extent they were able to. Although he started the process of sannyasa initiation, many ways of living the sannyasa life revealed themselves. People are initiated into sannyasa; some come for a limited time: one year, two years, three, four or five years. That is the period for which they live their sannyasa. Perfect. They teach, they go out, they serve, and they gain experience. Then they go back into society and live a normal life. There are people with a family, duties and responsibilities who come and receive initiation; they go back, do their sadhana, and fulfil



their responsibilities while living a normal householder life. There are those who come, receive initiation and continue to live in the ashram in the presence of the master for some time until a breakthrough happens in their life, and then they go.

Unique training

Out of the thousands who come in this manner, there are some who decide to dedicate their life. Those who decide to dedicate their life have to be groomed in a different manner. Those who receive initiation, but wish to remain a yoga teacher, have to be trained in a different manner. You can live your sannyasa identity, your spiritual identity, but remember that you are a yoga teacher; you are not the apex of sannyasa. You are not the fulfilment or the completeness of sannyasa; you just live your spiritual identity. Then there are those who commit themselves, and for these people a different training is required.

Even now there is a three-year sannyasa course going on, but for many it is a three-year stint only. I have to work with them in a different manner, as I know that after three years



they will be gone. They will live their life with a different spiritual awareness and identity, and if I can help them do that, perfect.

Then there will be some who will continue to stay for a bit longer; I will have to train them differently. There will be some who will decide to commit their life, and I will have to groom them differently. Thus, it is not one treatment for every initiate, remember that. Rather, according to the need, inclination and aspiration, different training has to be given.

Research into yoga

After starting the sannyasa training system, Sri Swamiji focused on research. The period between the mid-seventies and the mid-eighties was a period of intense research into yoga. There were very few institutions at that time conducting any kind of research; in fact, there were only two in all of India. One series of anatomical and physiological experiments was conducted by Swami Kuvalyananda in Kaivalyadham, Lonavala. It was purely physiological research. He would practise uddiyana bandha and have a CT image taken to show the position of the organs in that particular posture. In this manner, he tried to show the

inner workings of the body, the position of the different organs of the body, and the possible outcome of postures. He then started his work on identifying the health benefits of postures.

At the same time, the Bihar School of Yoga started its research into yoga therapy, to begin with. The effects of asana and pranayama, relaxation and meditation for developing and enhancing physical and mental health; how asanas, if they are able to open and expand the chest, can help asthmatic and restrictive respiratory conditions; whether a posture that affects the abdomen, liver, pancreas and kidneys can help in the management of diabetes, and so on.

In this manner, research into yoga therapy started through the Bihar School of Yoga. In the decade of the seventies, asthma, diabetes, skin diseases and many other physiological ailments were studied. The coordination of all this work was done entirely by Sri Swamiji by sending teachers and sannyasins from the Bihar School of Yoga to different medical centres, hospitals and research centres. They talked with the doctors, got the groups together, conducted the training, conducted the tests and analyzed the results. From the positive results that were discovered, books were written.

While yoga therapy research was taking place in India in the seventies, Sri Swamiji gave me one job: to discover the presence of yoga in different world cultures. I started researching this in South America, as at that time I used to live in Colombia. Through my study of South America, travel to remote places and museums, and examination of statues and figures, I found that once upon a time, a yogic culture was alive, vibrant, and living in South America.

Through the examination of museums in various countries, I found similar evidence in the Scandinavian and African countries. This evidence provided an understanding that once upon a time yoga was not only an Indian, but a worldwide culture. Due to the ravages of time, famine, death, destruction, war, migrations, earthquakes, volcanoes



and more, changes took place in society; new influences came and the previous influences waned and subsided. This happened with yoga as well; however, yoga was preserved in India. While it was lost from the other parts of the world, it was preserved in India, and the regeneration and revival of yoga is today once again taking place from within India.

Sri Swamiji also inspired me to do research on Kirlian photography, prana and pranayama, meditation, mantra and music. Living overseas, I would travel frequently and meet many people. Therefore, I was in a good position to interact with different types of people for research. While I was living in the US, we conducted research on drug addiction and on catatonic patients, we started programs in prisons and for drug rehabilitation. Simultaneously, many such activities were also taking place in Australia. The sannyasins would go to prisons and teach yoga to the prisoners. The sannyasins would bring yoga techniques into their professional areas of medicine and psychiatry, just to see how yoga could help individuals and the community. Thus, research became the main focus of the Bihar School of Yoga during the mid-seventies to mid-eighties. This was definitely a period of discovery, research and achievements.

Social application

Once the research came to a point where there was enough material, the social application of yoga began. This started in the eighties, when BSY was called to teach yoga in the coal industry, the steel industry, the paper industry, government undertakings and mega projects. It was discovered that yoga is able to increase efficiency at work. By increasing efficiency, the output increases as well. It was discovered that if both the workers and the administrators practise yoga, there are less union frictions.

In this way, many things happened, many discoveries were made, and yoga began to be integrated with society in various areas and undertakings. Schools, prisons and therapy were the three areas covered in Sri Swamiji's time.

Swami Niranjan's return to Munger

In 1982, Sri Swamiji said to me, "I want you to come back to India." At that time I was in the US. I asked him, "For what?" He said, "To take over the organization." I said, "I prefer to stay back in America." He looked at me, and I said, "But one thing is definite, if you are calling me, then there is no power on earth that will stop me from coming to you." He kept quiet, and returned to India. On 20th December



1982, I received a telegram from Munger: 'Return to India by 16th January positively.' I said, 'All right, he has given me twenty days to wind up.' It was Christmas time; no flights available, all shops closed, all administrative offices closed, all government offices closed, and I had just signed a deal for one hundred acres of land in Virginia for creating an ashram. Three days later I had to return the land, saying that I had been called back. Surprisingly, in ten days I was able to wind up the entire ashram, get the only flight ticket remaining and arrive at night in Munger after being away from India from 1971 to 1983. I did not even speak Hindi.

When I arrived at Jamalpur station, I did not know where to go, so I took a trekker and came to Munger. I got off at the trekker-stand and grabbed a rickshaw. The rickshaw-wallah asked me, "Which ashram?" I said, "What do you mean 'which ashram'? There is only one ashram, the Bihar School of Yoga." He said, "No, there are two. One is over there and one is over here." 'Over here' meaning Ganga Darshan and 'over there' meaning the old BSY ashram. I asked, "Where does everybody live now?" He said, "Oh, in the new one." I said, "Take me there."

I reached Ganga Darshan on the night of 16th January. I arrived at the gate and knocked. "Who are you?" they asked, and I said, "My name is Swami Niranjana." "Wait a minute," came the reply. Of course, the sannyasins did not know me, as I was never here. They had only heard my name, but they had never seen me. Therefore, I had to wait at nine o'clock at night, on the 16th January, in the freezing cold, and I could hear somebody talking on the phone, "Somebody named Swami Niranjana has come to the gate." Sri Swamiji had played a trick, he had not informed anybody. Then I heard his voice on the phone, "Yes, let him in and send him to my room." I went in and was taken to his room, and there he opened the gates and said, "Welcome!"

On 19th January, he gave me the charge, and said "I'm leaving." I said, "What do you mean, 'leaving'?" He said, "Yes, I'm leaving now." I said "No. I don't even know the



language, I don't even know the people. I don't even know this location. You have to give me some time." He said, "Okay, I'll give you some time." He gave me some time to pick up the things, and then he left and eventually settled in Rikhia.

When I arrived, after having been overseas and interacted with different cultures, societies and nationalities, I came with my own set of ideas. However, I realized that the foundation stone that had been laid by Sri Swamiji must be maintained. The development of yoga had been taken to another level by integrating it into society; in the army, in the railways, in the various mega-industries of India. Yoga had become a household word. Bihar Yoga had become a household term as well as an integrated concept of yoga. Thus, it was the sannyasins and the research that gave a boost to the propagation of yoga as per the vision and teachings of Sri Swamiji.

Vision and New Horizons

Sri Swami Satyananda started the propagation of yoga in 1963 from Munger, with yoga training to household people for their needs and daily requirements. In addition, he trained a group of teachers who could go back to their respective places and become yoga teachers, and also prepared a group of dedicated sannyasins to propagate yoga throughout the country and the world.

Researching the effects of yoga

During this process, in order to develop the subject of yoga in a scientific and practical manner, Sri Swamiji initiated research into the practices of yoga. When this research work started, there were only two yoga ashrams in the country that were trying to develop the subject of yoga rather than teaching yoga from the books.

One institute, Kaivalyadham, is in the western part of India, and here, the physiological and fundamental research on yoga asanas, pranayamas, mudras and bandhas was being conducted. The second place to initiate research was the Bihar School of Yoga, with the aid of medical doctors, hospitals, medical research centres, and medical faculties throughout the country. The first kind of research conducted by the sannyasins under the inspiration of Sri Swamiji was the research into yoga therapy; how yoga can be utilized to help alleviate different



physiological, psychological, psychosomatic, and somato-psychic problems.

Many discoveries were made as a result of this research; much data was collected which became the foundation for the publication of books on the management of different illnesses. Alongside this therapy research, research into other aspects of yoga was also initiated, especially in meditation. What happens to the mind during the practice of meditation? What kinds of experiences come up, what altered states does one experience? Research was conducted on prana and pranayama and on the application of yoga in the management of different socio-psychological ills and problems, such as drug addiction, alcohol addiction, and the problems faced by people living in halfway homes, catatonic centres, psychiatric hospitals, and prisons. Gradually, the application of yoga therapy also started on a mass-scale throughout the world. There was a time when Satyananda Yoga became so popular in Australia that practically every prison had a Satyananda Yoga teacher visiting on a regular basis to teach yoga to prisoners.

In this manner, the application of Satyananda Yoga was spread throughout different strata of society.

Sri Swamiji had given me certain areas of research to look into, especially the meditation and the pranayama studies, which I was able to be part of while in the US and Australia. In the US, I worked with a doctor named Joe Kamiya who was Nobel Laureate in alpha research. Together, we conducted experiments on meditation, antar mouna and ajapa japa, to learn and define the different meditative states that one can experience as one goes deeper. There was another doctor, Dr Todd Mikuriya, a Japanese doctor working in San Francisco, California, at the Gladman Memorial Centre. He conducted meditation research on me. He would have me meditate while he monitored me. In one of these sessions, all the electronic equipment stopped functioning, and he could not figure out why this had happened. We checked the connections again and again, and each time everything was in order.



However, whenever he connected the sensors to me, only the flat line would be seen on the screen. This curious result led to another level of research into sensory deprivation, *pratyahara*, total cut-off from senses and sense perception, which I was again involved in. Even in one of his satsangs, Sri Swamiji mentioned this research. He said jokingly, “If I ask Niranjan to shut himself down, he will shut himself down completely.” Using Kirlian photography and various other techniques, research was also conducted on prana, to see how pranayama and prana vidya can enhance, retain and utilize the flow of prana shakti in the body. Thus, quite a few studies were conducted, and the outcome of this research became the guidelines for the further development and imparting of yoga training to people.

Four levels of yoga application

Despite initiating yoga training, Sri Swamiji was not a teacher of yoga; rather, he was the engineer of life and used yoga as a tool to enhance the qualities and faculties of life. In this context he also made it clear that yoga should be understood in the right perspective.

Yoga practitioner: As long as you are playing with yoga, experimenting with yoga and using yoga to release your own stresses and anxieties, and deal with your own problems which are physical or psychological in nature, you are only practising certain aspects of yoga and you remain a yoga practitioner only. Yoga practitioners leave yoga once their aim and goal is achieved.

If you can learn how to relax, sleep well and get rid of your insomnia and anxiety, then after some time your yoga practice drops away. If you are helped in your respiratory problems and you begin to breathe a little easier and the impact of asthma and bronchial problems are reduced, then over a period of time, as you feel better, your yoga practices also subside.

This is the way most people use yoga, without going into its depth. These people who skim the surface of yoga

are called ‘yoga practitioners’, as they are like bees jumping from flower to flower trying to gather pollen. Such people who are trying to work with their own body and mind think, ‘By practising kriya yoga for one month I can awaken my kundalini and become realized.’ Without even knowing themselves, they jump into the practice of kriya yoga. When nothing happens they say, “Oh, well, maybe the teacher was not right, as I did not experience the rising of kundalini.” This is the first level, where yoga is used for personal gains and needs, without any awareness of how one can consciously and sequentially improve the quality of life.

Yoga sadhaka: The second level of yoga practice is known as yoga sadhana, whereby one tries to experience and attain the goal as set and defined by yoga. After all, each yoga has defined a specific goal, a specific aim to achieve. What is the goal of bhakti yoga? The purpose of bhakti yoga is to purify and sublimate the emotions, not to attain samadhi. What is the purpose of hatha yoga? The purpose of hatha yoga is to regulate the pranas in the body. What is the purpose of raja yoga? The purpose of raja yoga is to still the active patterns of the mind. Thus, each yoga has an aim, an aspiration, a sankalpa, a direction. If you move according to the direction provided by yoga, you become a yogi. If you practise yoga to experience *chitta vritti nirodha*, cessation of the mental distractions, then you become a yoga sadhaka. However, if you use yoga to eliminate your stress and tension, then you are a yoga practitioner.

As you move from one level to the next, your involvement and integration with yoga becomes stronger and deeper. Your appreciation of yoga becomes stronger and deeper as you begin to see the qualitative change taking place within yourself, in your nature, behaviour, attitude, wisdom. If yoga has not touched your wisdom, then you are not a yoga sadhaka. You are only flirting with yoga.

Yogic lifestyle and culture: The third level is when yoga, after having become a sadhana, converts itself into a lifestyle. You begin to live the principles of yoga on a moment to



moment basis. You do not have to find a separate time to practise yoga, but your life becomes an expression of that yogic awareness, of that yogic attainment.

The fourth level is the yogic culture; you begin to radiate yoga. You radiate the purity of yoga, the shanti of yoga; you radiate the attainment and perfection of yoga.

It was this sequence that Sri Swamiji defined as 'progressive yoga', to gain the maximum from this science and elevate oneself. This classification of yoga was created keeping in mind the guidelines given by Swami Sivananda, that yoga should develop the human mind, the human heart and human creativity.

This integrated development of human nature must also lead to a deeper and progressive experience of the yogic process in life, as the flowering of human nature and the development of the yogic process complement each other. It was upon this idea that the basic philosophy of the Bihar School of Yoga was developed.



Developing human potential

It was also observed by Sri Swamiji that when older people, the grown-ups, come to yoga, they are already conditioned. They are conditioned by life, society, culture, religion, ideas of ethics and morality, by so many things. There are so many influences in society which shape the human nature. In this conditioned state, it is difficult for the innate qualities of consciousness to manifest, for when you are conditioned, the doors of perception are closed.

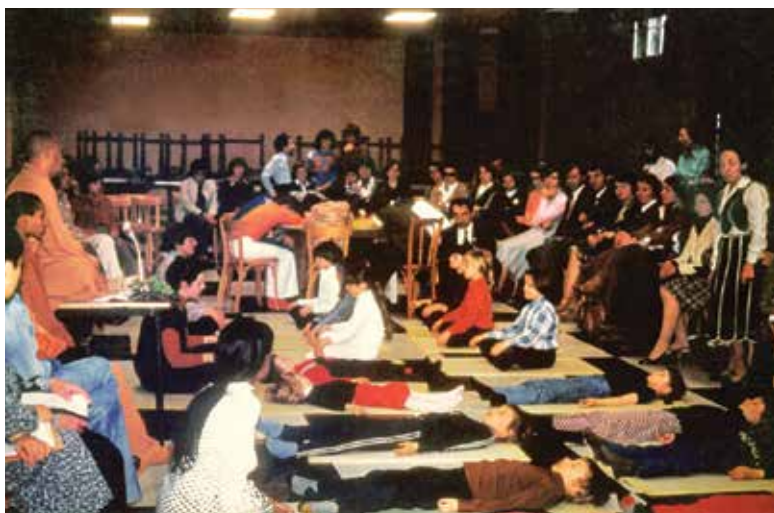
If you make a room with four walls and no windows, how can sunlight enter that room? Your social conditioning is external; therefore, your appreciation of the spiritual is based on your external connections and external understanding. You are actually missing the point; you are looking for solutions outside through your external connections of the senses, intellect and mind, rather than allowing the intuitive awareness to give the experience of that unconditioned nature.

Sri Swamiji was not a yoga teacher, remember this. He was the developer of yoga. In the process of developing

yoga, he discovered the effect of yoga on the human subconscious and unconscious mind. With this discovery, he said, "Along with the body, why not cultivate the strength of the subconscious and unconscious mind as well?" For this purpose, Sri Swamiji used the tools of pratyahara and dharana to access the subconscious mind and to feed information to the subconscious mind. This information manifested when the time was right for it.

Many know about the experiment where yoga nidra was used to teach children. This initiated the thought process that if we are able to help children develop their potential, they will become better citizens of tomorrow, they will be more in touch with their nature and spirit rather than with the senses and material objects. The opportunity to further develop this theory presented itself when yoga was applied at schools in France.

The application of yoga in French schools confirmed that yoga practices do have an effect on the memory and mental behaviour of children. Among these children, the attention span increased, the concentration improved, the retention power improved, assimilation improved, interactions



improved, communication improved, the dissipations lessened, and there was a marked change in the behaviour. When these results came out, schools took to yoga like wildfire.

Yoga for children

Once upon a time, back in the late seventies, in France alone there were 77,000 registered yoga teachers. I'm talking about thirty-five years ago: 77,000 registered yoga teachers in France alone, all from different groups and traditions, organizations and sects. It was a very large number for that time. I don't have today's data, but I can only imagine how many there are now. In those days, our job was to train the teachers so that in each school the teacher would train the students in their class.

Later on, this movement became a global movement called Research of Yoga in Education, or RYE, led by Swami Yogabhakti in Paris, and covering the European region. Along the same lines, Rishi Arundhati started another movement in Canada called Yoga Education in Schools, or YES, covering North America and South America. In this manner, yoga became an integral part of the education system.

Then, after the World Yoga Convention in 1993, the time was ripe in Ganga Darshan to establish the Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, the children's yoga fellowship. This movement started in 1995 with seven young school students, and today the Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal has over 5,000 children trained as yoga teachers in Munger, 35,000 children in the district of Munger, and about 1,50,000 children in the whole of India. These children conducted their own research using three asanas, two pranayamas and one technique of relaxation and concentration. Psychological tests were performed in many different parameters. Seven hundred children involved themselves in this research to record the improvement in memory, attention span, creativity, communication and behaviour, and personal discipline. The overall result was a marked improvement in the mental creativity of these children.



Preparing the future generation

Sri Swamiji had said that if we are able to access children and bring about a qualitative change in their lives, they will be in a better position to deal with their stresses and tensions in the future while using their creativity to the maximum potential. These children will always have a silver lining behind the dark cloud.

The real yoga education is for children, not for you. You have missed your flight. For you, yoga is limited to asana and pranayama, and maybe a little bit of meditation just to feel good. Beyond that, to bring about a qualitative change in behaviour is next to impossible; what is conditioned is conditioned, what is formed is formed, what is made is made, and very few people can break that down.

You can apply yoga in your life to derive whatever you need from it, but for a qualitative change to happen in life and society, yoga must be introduced to the younger

generations. That has been a sankalpa of Sri Swamiji. After the Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal opened here in 1995, the first group of kanyas came together in Rikhia in the year 2000. The approach there was different; it was not a yogic approach. The background from which those children came was different; their social background was different and their needs were different. However, despite all that, they still continue to imbibe yoga, even to this day. By imbibing yoga they have been able to come out of their closed shells and express creativity that is unique. It is wonderful to see the perfection, which adults lack, in the life of a child. Thus, grooming the children to create a better tomorrow is one of the aims of the Bihar School of Yoga.



Swami Niranjanananda was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual sciences through yoga nidra. In 1971 he was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa, and for twelve years he lived overseas, acquiring an understanding of different cultures and helping further his guru's mission to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.



He returned to India in 1983 to guide the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and Yoga Research Foundation at Ganga Darshan. In 1990 he was initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin and in 1993 anointed spiritual preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda Saraswati. He established Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first university of yoga, in 1994, Yoga Publications Trust in 2000, and a children's yoga movement, Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, in 1995. He travelled extensively to guide seekers around the world until 2009, when he received the command to commence a new phase of sannyasa life.

In 2010, he established Sannyasa Peeth, to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. In 2013 he also commenced the arduous panchagni sadhana. In 2014, he embarked on a Bharat Yatra, an all-India tour, transmitting the gift of yoga to all. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom. Simultaneously, he has revived various ancient knowledge systems and practices of India.

In 2017, he received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Government of India, for the outstanding work in the field of yoga.

Author of many classic books on yoga and other spiritual streams, Swami Niranjan is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. He ably combines tradition with modernity as he continues to work for his guru's mission.



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

The Bihar School of Yoga, located at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth in the dusty town of Munger, Bihar, is the birthplace of Satyananda Yoga, also known as Bihar Yoga. Founded by Swami Satyananda Saraswati in 1963, it is an international yoga training centre, a gurukul as well as a sannyasa ashram.

In this volume, Swami Niranjanananda, Yogapeethadhis and successor to Swami Satyananda, succinctly sums up the history of BSY: its origins in the teachings and mandate of paramguru Swami Sivananda, its humble beginnings in Munger, the landmarks reached under Swami Satyananda's guidance, and the continuation of the journey during his own time. Not only does Swamiji outline the events that have contributed to the growth of the institution, but he also encapsulates the philosophy that has shaped its vision. This book will serve as a guide for all in understanding what went into the makings of this monument of yoga.



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